

Characters

Gary Black: (Blacky) Shy, reserved, sympathetic, imaginative, low self esteem, lacking confidence, shirks responsibility, Appearance: "Mass of a stick insect." (p.9) He has a "severe occipital occlusion", in other words Buck teeth. "Geeze, mate, you could eat an apple through a bird cage." Is the second eldest in a large rowdy family. He has a good sense of humor and a vivid imagination which is evident on pages 9&10

Unlike other boys his age in the town he reads voraciously and is obsessed with improving his vocabulary. "All the kids in the town, like Dazza and Pickles, hate school. Useless. Don't learn nothing. Can't wait to leave. Not me, I like school." P.8

He is not particularly coordinated or good at sports-

"A gutless wonder is about the worst thing you can be in this town. If you're a boy that is.....Once you've been labelled a gutless wonder, then that's it the label sticks....It's there for life, no matter what you do." P.9

"It's called the Thumper tackle....Your reputation survives. Your forehead remains label-free." P.10

"I wasn't much of a footballe. Not much of an optimist either." P.16

"I was the Worst kick in the whole side, probably the whole peninsula." P.16

"Jesus Christ, not him he couldn't kick the ball over a jam jar." ... "After that they called me Jam-Jar Black." P.17

He judges people on first impressions but as he matures throughout the year he learns not to be so quick to judge, as people can grow and change. (Team-man and Gary)

Because of his poor relationship with his father, Gary's self esteem is very low and he doesn't have much confidence in his abilities and is afraid of taking chances in case he proves himself inadequate.

This is why he dislikes responsibility, he is afraid of letting people down like he disappointed his father. P.50 He is worried, "what if my best is not good enough?" (p.51)

He believes in fairness and that is why he is so angry that Dumby is cheated out of what was rightfully his, "What a joke! It just wasn't right. It wasn't fair. But what could I do?" (p. 134)

Though friendly and sociable, Gary is essentially shy especially around members of the opposite sex.

This is most evident in his relationship with 'Cathy the camper' as he cannot even summon the bravery to speak. "The old man's right, I said to myself, I'm gutless. A gutless fucking wonder. Tears were sliding down my face." (p.174)= Low self esteem.

He is the character whom develops the most and is a different person at the end of the story. He grows in awareness of his community, develops a greater sense of self-worth, (overcomes the damaging label of his father) to gain a sense of independence. At the end of the novel he is confident enough to make his mind up for himself and stops dodging responsibility.

Examples of Gary acting independently and going against the town norms and expectations-

- ◆ Making the best of his educational opportunities
- ◆ Making friends with Dumby
- ◆ Not judging his new Aboriginal friends by stereotypical expectations
- ◆ Forming a friendship with Clarence
- ◆ Expecting fairness and decent treatment of his friends regardless of race- Trophy night
- ◆ Begins to show an intolerance for racism dislike of town graffiti and pub jokes

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- ◆ Determination to attend the funeral as a mark of respect/ standing up for what he knows is right.
- ◆ Choosing the difficult path that will come at great cost, because it is the right thing to do. (knows it will upset his father and cost him the relationship with Cathy.)
- ◆ Standing up to his father and telling 'his' truth.
- ◆ Painting over the Graffiti

But it is not all smooth sailing; occasionally there are slip ups on the journey-

- ◆ Being a fraud
- ◆ Breaking his own promises
- ◆ Denial of having Aboriginal friends
- ◆ Avoiding responsibility
- ◆ Seeking the easy path instead of the correct one
- ◆ Accepting racist belief system without question

Bob Black: The absent father- "*as usual he was down at the pub.*" (P.31) "he only sat down to eat with us when the pub was closed- Sundays and Christmas Day." (p.31)

Appearance: "*He was a city boy, born and bred in the big smoke.*" (P.64)

"*He's a big bloke my old man. Well over six foot...But there was no way I'd ever be as big as the old man. Maybe as tall, but never as big, never as strong.*" (p.65)

Uneducated bad boy: "The old man'd say things like," we seen him down at the pub" or 'I done it yesterday." (p.33)

He is an abusive and judgmental father who labels his son "a gutless wonder". Bob is a 'good time father' who shows very little interest in his son. -"The old man wasn't interested in the footy." (p.81) unless there is an attachment of glory for him. (See the grand Final Do)

Gwen Black : Supportive, loving, nurturing and protective of her son. Always there at the football and prepared to offer him advice. She listens to him and plays interference to protect him from his father's violence and abusive nature. Gary is aware of his parents incompatibility, "One day ...I'm going to ask her what did you marry him for?...They just didn't seem to have Much in common, my olds, not from the start." (p.81) She hopes the best for her son but is realistic and says, "that you do your best. That's all anyone expects." (p.32)

MUM:

"She came to every match and there wasn't much she didn't know about the game, especially tactics. I'm sure she would've been a better coach than Arks.'p31

".. tactical adviser." P.32

"They weren't going to listen to somebodies roly-poly mum, even if she was a tactical genius. No way." P.32

"mum always spoke properly, and she hardly ever swore."p.34

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Darcy: The retired neighbour who always does things slow and precise, yet is always reliable and constant, unlike Gary's father. (read description on page45) He is almost a surrogate dad who is prepared to take an interest in the boy and always prepared to lend an ear to his concerns. Gary displays great fondness for the old man, "I liked the Meryl, it reminded me of Darcy – it was old and slow, but it had a heap of character." (p.63) He offers good advice and provokes the boy's conscience. He helps Gary to think for himself. He is a good story teller. (p.48) Darcy is fair and just, as demonstrated by ensuring that all customers get the correct number of 'gents' in their jar, "They pay for fifty, they get fifty, said Darcy emphatically. I'm not going to start gypping people now, not at my age." (p.50) This does make him a good role model but, much like real people, he is not perfect and demonstrates the ingrained racism of his town when he comments to Gary to be careful mixing with Aboriginal girls because they all have "the clap". (p.122)

Despite this character flaw, Darcy provokes Gary's conscience and allows him to be proactive in his desire to change things by offering the advice "I daresay they should, young'un. I daresay they should".(p.251) He supports the Black children when they make a stand against the father and is happy to play along with their lie. He backs up mum's advice, "do your best." (p.51)

Pickles: Narrow minded (" He only went too school because the government made him."p.59), prejudiced, xenophobic, scheming, (getting in on the 'gents' business) disgusting social habits, sexual deviant with a "hyperactive sexual imagination,"(p.60) and he was "not athletic"(p.23) and proved to be a "hopeless footballer". (p.58) He takes on the role of harmless deviant and anti-hero. Pickles Mickles was "one of my bestest friends," (p.58) but it was really a relationship born out of convenience rather than sharing anything more than age and location in common. "His old man and my old man were fishing partners" until they had a business 'falling out'. "The problem was his personal hygiene", (p.60) he "had the munga real bad", (p.59) but never did anything about it. He is driven by self interest than any real concern for his friends, "Pickles was looking really pleased with himself. I'm sure he thought that from now on, with that medal around his neck, he'd be spending quality time down the bushes."(p.129)

Dazza: Another of Gary's friends not provided with much detail about him. He hates school, "Don't learn nothing", but he is entertainment and company for Gary in the small town.

Mr. Robertson: 'ARKS' Robbo (p.192)

He is considered "a terrible businessman", (p.8) who "Only survives because the nungas buy their supplies from him because he's the coach of the footy team." (p.8) In his glory days he was a real football hero, a "real champion in his day." (p.10) he was lured back as captain coach and always got his team into a final but never won one. When "the arse dropped out of the wheat market" the town could no longer afford to pay him and "his wife left him with the kids." (p.12) Page 18 gives the details of his life. When Gary helps the team win the premiership, Arks is as proud as punch (p.114-115) "Blacky," it said, beaming. 'I love you.'" He genuinely tries to help Gary reach his potential as a footballer.

MR. ROBERTSON:

"Arks"

"He only survives because the Nungas buy their supplies from him. And the Nungas only buy their supplies from him because he's the coach of the footy team." p.8

"...a real champ in his day, the best footballer ever to come to the port." P.11

"Poor Arks- with his banged-up ute,, his stale Pollywaffles, his baggy shorts, his Brylcreem, his missus who shot through, all those finales and not a bloody one. I was feeling sorry for him.' P.19